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'I hate this place': Families protest on behalf of long-term care residents, compare isolation to prison

**By Elizabeth McSheffrey • Global News**

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News

'I hate this place': Families protest on behalf of long-term care residents, compare isolati...

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WATCH: Dozens of Nova Scotians protested in Halifax on Tuesday, advocating for their loved ones in long-term care homes, who have been isolated since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Elizabeth McSheffrey reports, the families allege the current conditions for seniors are a violation of human rights and are calling on the government to loosen restrictions right away – Sep 1, 2020





Dozens of Nova Scotians took to the streets of downtown Halifax on Tuesday, protesting on behalf of relatives in long-term care homes (LTCs), who have seldom been able to see their loved ones during the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).

The marchers alleged the isolation LTC residents experienced is a violation of basic human rights. They called on the provincial government to immediately empower family caregivers to tend to their relatives inside these facilities.

“We don’t have years to deal with this, or months. We need to do something now,” said Catherine Johnston, whose father has severe Parkinson’s disease and lives in the Camp Hill Veterans Memorial Building.

“Long-term care patients have had such severe restrictions, they don’t have the same human rights the rest of us have.”

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Under current provincial restrictions, outdoor visitation with up to five visitors per resident is permitted at LTCs, and indoor visitation is allowed — closely supervised and with personal protective equipment — for one person per resident at a time.

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2:06

Seniors 'deteriorating': Family members dissatisfied wi...

Seniors 'deteriorating': Family members dissatisfied with new long-term care home visitation rules – Aug 28, 2020

Family can accompany LTC residents to medical appointments and there is no cap on the number of people a resident can designate for indoor visits.

The Department of Health and Wellness has said these rules reflect safety as its top priority.

It said it recognizes the valuable role played by family caregivers, but visitation will remain limited in accordance with Public Health guidance and the abilities of each LTC residence.

“We understand that COVID-19 has been particularly difficult on those who

live and work in long-term care, as well as their loved ones,” wrote spokesperson Carole Rankin on Tuesday.

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“Recent outbreaks in long-term care facilities in Manitoba are important reminders of how quickly it can spread... We continue to monitor the epidemiology and risks in LTC facilities to implement appropriate directives and policies that balance the needs for social interaction and the safety of residents and staff from an outbreak.”

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READ MORE: [Nova Scotia continues to loosen restrictions for long-term care residents](https://globalnews.ca/news/7309772/i-hate-this-place-families-protest-on-behalf-of-long-term-care-residents-compare-isolation-to-prison/)

Given the staffing and space restrictions at many facilities in the province, however, families say they often remain limited to one visit per week at arm's

length, lasting less than an hour in total.

As the rest of Nova Scotia enjoys the freedom of mobility and access to goods and services, families at the protest say their loved ones' health is deteriorating.

"I have a tough time here, I hate this place," Trudy Needler read from a letter her father at Northwood Halifax wrote on Friday.

"I eat crappy food three times a day, but have had to stay indoors all the time, laying on my bed, staying in my room... Mostly in the jail here."

 TWEET THIS

The families [are demanding](#) daily access to LTC residents for at least two designated and trained family caregivers. They demand the government funds the training, which would educate caregivers in testing, screening and infection control requirements in LTCs.

They say training, combined with personal protective equipment, would alleviate some of the burden on LTC workers and allow them to provide critical care while posing a minimal risk of transmitting the novel coronavirus.

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“We understood that for the first two months, there were big concerns about transmission,” said Lesley Barnes, whose father Terry Barnes lives at Camp Hill.

“The institution looks after the physical needs of the patient extremely well, but the psychological, emotional health really affects longevity.”

1:56

Families protest against continuing visitor restrictions ...

Families protest against continuing visitor restrictions in long-term care homes – Aug 4, 2020

According to a [July report](#) from the National Institute on Ageing, the restrictive visitation measures in place during COVID-19 have caused significant concern among experts that “substantial and potentially irreversible harm” may be done to LTC residents.

It also says some restrictive visitor policies may violate the rights of residents to make “informed and risk-based decisions which prioritize their access to visitors over the risks of them contracting COVID-19.”

That report, providing an “evidence-informed” guidance document for re-opening Canadian LTCs during the pandemic, advocates for a “more balanced approach” that differentiates between general visitors and essential

family caregivers.

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It recommends dropping restrictions on the length of time and frequency of family caregivers visits, provided it doesn't hinder other LTC operations, along with unhindered indoor and outdoor access to LTCs for those caregivers.

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